

How
LOCAL COMMUNITIES
CAN PROMOTE



EDUCATION

Girls'

Project Design No. 1

ENHANCING GIRLS' EDUCATION THROUGH COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

WHY SHOULD LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS INVEST IN GIRLS' EDUCATION?

Education of all children is important. Education, especially primary schooling, promotes democracy, economic growth, and social development. Through formal schooling, children are equipped with skills that are fundamental to social and economic success. Educated people can learn by themselves, teach others, acquire new skills in the workplace, make good decisions, and participate responsibly in civil society. The education of all children is important, but considerable research and experience demonstrates that investing in the education of girls yields especially high social and economic returns. Female literacy and schooling have been linked to improvements in agricultural production and family, maternal, and child health. Yet, of the estimated one billion adult illiterates worldwide, two-thirds are women.

Despite enormous gains in education in recent years, girls' completion rates still lag those of boys. The reasons include cultural beliefs about the appropriateness of educating girls, family needs and resource levels, facilities available for girls at schools, and treatment of girls in the classroom by teachers and male classmates. In spite of these barriers, many countries have initiated comprehensive changes in their educational systems to expand access, improve instructional quality, and increase efficiency. Such programs have laid the groundwork for increased educational participation of all children, but they are often insufficient to reduce gender disparities between girls and boys. The fact that many of the impediments to girls' enrollment and persistence in school are specific to girls and not to boys requires a concerted effort to focus on specific interventions that are designed to increase educational opportunities for girls as a development imperative.

Local community organizations can make a difference in girls' education. To overcome the barriers to girls' education, leaders of society must become active participants in determining the causes and implementing culturally appropriate solutions to specific problems in educating girls. Local community organizations can make a difference in girls' education. They have a concern for the local community, an ability to influence public opinion, an ability to confront important issues, and can manage activities. These attributes are essential for the success of girls' education.

WHAT ARE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS?

Community schools are community-based and community-managed educational facilities and programs. Most community schools depend on contributions for construction and maintenance from the community. The schools are developed, organized, and managed from within the community, so they typically have:

- local support;
- innovative partnerships among government, private organizations, and communities;
- locally relevant, child-centered curricula, and teaching; and
- increased opportunities for girls' education at sustainable cost.

Community schools are successful in many countries. Bangladesh, Colombia, Egypt, Guatemala, Malawi, and Mali provide examples. The names of the programs differ — Bangladesh Rural Action Committee (BRAC) Schools, *Escuela Nueva Unitaria*, community schools, and village-based schools. All have local communities, with assistance from local organizations, that have been organized to provide quality basic education for their children.

WHY ARE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS IMPORTANT FOR GIRLS' EDUCATION?

Community schools are important because they help to overcome major barriers to girls' education. For example, although the distance from home to school may be only three to five kilometers, the trip to school involves leaving the family's protection and that of the immediate community. The distance poses a risk to girls. Even when the danger is slight, cultural values of propriety in many communities prevent girls from traveling unescorted far from home. Community schools allow families to provide an education for girls within the safety of their own community — under their own control. Other barriers to girls' education — family demands for girls' labor, the cost of schooling, views of the appropriateness of educating girls, and the lack of educated females who serve as role models — are addressed by community schools in collaboration with parents and other interested community members.

HOW CAN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION GET INVOLVED IN COMMUNITY SCHOOLING?

Developing a community school is not difficult. Community schools have existed for many years and in many settings. There are many experiences that can provide models for success. Some of the most important contributions the community organization can provide are strong leadership and resources that can be used to overcome barriers.

Providing leadership in design and implementation. Local leadership is critical to the success of community schools. Interested community members who understand social change, who are well placed to organize political support and resources, who have the power of persuasion, and who have a deep commitment that can withstand disappointments and contrary pressures are essential.

Providing or locating resources. Organizational networks and technical skills place local organizations in a good position to help organize and gain support and financing for many aspects of community schools. For example, local organizations can:

- Contact education experts familiar with community schools to help the community plan;
- Mobilize community members to provide land and/or a building for the school;
- Work with regional educators to help the community understand government regulations and gain regional support;
- Assist in the development of specifications for school facilities, furnishings, and equipment;
- Mobilize community members to provide labor and/or materials to refurbish the school grounds and/or building;
- Assist in identifying or providing housing for teachers;
- Provide or support teacher and staff training;
- Purchase supplementary instructional materials for teachers and children;
- Assist in monitoring teacher attendance, student enrollment, and student learning; and
- Assist in providing continuous improvement to the school.

Local organizations have much to offer local communities that want to establish a school.

DESIGNING AND IMPLEMENTING A COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Once a local organization or community leader decides to support a community school, it is important to work with the community to explain and develop the idea. The suggestions offered here reflect experience and research but must be adjusted to local contexts. Starting small helps communities to learn from their experiences and build support systems as the program expands. The following guidelines provide a framework for establishing a community school.

Consider the community's motivation. When deciding whether to start a community school, the local organization or community leader should consider the community's enthusiasm and motivation for education. Communities that have initiative and strong desire produce better results.

Work in collaboration with the entire community. Successful community-school programs grow from the experience and needs of the people they serve, drawing on experiences from other settings when appropriate. In addition to the relationships the organization has already established in the community, there is a need to develop and strengthen relationships and collaboration with other community members and with representatives from the Ministry of Education.

Community members are the most knowledgeable resource on the issues facing the community. Use them as a resource. Establish a local education committee composed of key members from all sectors of the community. Use their help to assess the current situation and expectations and to develop goals. The education committee is responsible for selecting a site for the school, identifying potential teachers, and monitoring teacher attendance and student enrollment. It is important that community schools evolve from the community, for the community.

Develop a quality education program. A good community school is, above all else, a good school. A good educational environment consists of active, participatory learning, relevant curriculum and materials, multiple subjects, including reading and mathematics, and frequent assessment of students' progress.

Teachers in community schools are frequently recruited from and selected by the local communities. In successful community schools, these teachers are provided practical, hands-on, preservice training, with an emphasis on learning through observation and interaction. They are then provided in-service training and supervision to develop their skills and knowledge. The training of teachers for community schools is often contracted to a local organization, typically a nongovernmental organization (NGO), although other community organizations or the district education office can also be helpful.

Work with a representative of the Ministry of Education (MOE). A good community school has a strong working relationship with a representative of the government, seeks to use the MOE curriculum, observes the MOE's regulations and supervisory system, and accesses available resources, such as training for teachers.

Maintain an attitude of continuous improvement. The local community organization can use its leadership to emphasize improvement in the school. Typical improvements include continuous community involvement and support, additional in-service development of staff, and an increased network of resource persons.

WHAT ARE THE COSTS OF A COMMUNITY SCHOOL?

For community schools to survive and thrive, their costs must be comparable to those of government schools. This has been the case where community-school programs have succeeded. From experiences with community schools in Bangladesh, Ecuador, Egypt, and Pakistan, educators have learned that it is economically and educationally feasible to establish high-quality, community-supported schools in poor, rural areas. Although per-pupil costs in the community schools tend to be about 10 to 25 percent higher than in government schools, reduced repetition and drop-out and increased achievement mean that the community schools are more efficient and cost-effective. Efforts are made to reduce the financial burden on parents. For example, in one program, where parents are not able to afford fees, their children are supported through a community fund managed by the school committee.

In developing a community school, the following costs should be considered:

- **Research and Development Costs** — to build local support, develop organizational and personnel capacity, and grow political and technical support. These costs represent a major share of expendi-

tures at the outset. For long-term growth, the costs are about 10 – 15 percent of ongoing expenses. These costs include:

- conducting community consultations;
- identifying and surveying possible sites;
- consulting with educational experts;
- planning; and
- advocacy.

Investments in these areas promote sound planning, good community support, and a sustained effort.

- **Start-up Costs** — the costs necessary to establish a school at a new site. For community schools these costs include:
 - providing the land, materials, and labor to build a new school or classroom or to renovate an existing building;
 - recruiting and training teachers and support staff; and
 - providing school furnishings and libraries.
- **Labor and Maintenance Costs** — are those necessary to maintain a school. These costs include:
 - teachers' salaries;
 - instructional materials;
 - administrative and supervisory costs; and
 - maintenance of facilities and furnishings.

Illustrative Budget

The sample budget below is based on a network of 20 community schools in the Community School Project in Egypt, a cooperative program of UNICEF and the Ministry of Education.

Category	Percentage total cost	Sample	
		Per school	Per child
<i>NGO</i>			
Salaries	30-45	\$809	\$27
Training	3-5	\$69	\$3
Travel and transportation	5-10	\$166	\$5
Other direct costs	10-15	\$380	\$13
Monitoring and evaluation	5	--	--
Administrative costs	5-10	\$141	\$4
<i>Ministry of Education</i>		--	--
Facilitators	MoE	\$410	\$14
Curriculum, materials/texts, and school snacks	MoE	\$178	\$7
Supervision	MoE	\$67	\$2
<i>Total Costs</i>		\$2,220	\$75

HOW LONG DOES IT TAKE TO IMPLEMENT A COMMUNITY SCHOOL?

A community school can open within a year of a decision to establish one. In the first four months, during the research-and-development phase, it is desirable to establish a favorable relationship between local officials and regional representatives of the ministry. Both must view the project with favor. This requires the local community organization to engage in extensive dialogue with the community and to understand how regulations, financing, and management will support the initiative. Advocates of the community school must also ensure that all key actors view the program as a collective effort to provide quality learning for children, especially girls.

During the second four months, the focus turns to establishing and starting the school. During this period the local community organization must work with the community to: establish committees to oversee the school, consult with representatives of the Ministry of Education, consult parents, recruit students, assist in the selection of teachers and arrangements for preservice training, and prepare the physical environment and instructional materials. At the same time, school committees should be selecting prospective teachers and arranging training.

Instruction typically begins during the next four months. Instruction and management of the school is a development process that requires time, constant attention, and support. Partners in these activities should include the Ministry of Education, local support groups, and the community.

SUGGESTED TIMELINE FOR STARTING A COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Leading the effort to develop a community school, the local community organization or a community mobilizer can make a positive impact on the lives of a community's boys and girls and promote economic development.

Time frame	Actors	Activities
Months 1-4	Community Initiating organization Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate dialogue with community leaders and/or local officials • Obtain broad community support • Establish relationship with government representative • Assess local and government resources • Recruit, appoint core staff • Understand government regulations • Recruit and appoint administrative staff • Establish working policies
Months 4-8	Community Initiating organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an education committee • Prepare plans and facilities • Consult with ministry representative • Consult with parents, recruit pupils • Obtain curriculum guides from Ministry of Education (MOE) • Select teachers • Arrange preservice training (MOE or NGO) • Prepare instructional materials
Months 8-12	Community Initiating organization and Ministry of Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin school operation • Form partnerships with MOE, local support groups, etc. • Arrange in-service training/supervision (MOE or NGO) • Monitor progress and make adjustments • Begin second cycle; identify new communities and partners

SUMMARY

Community schools have made a difference in many communities by overcoming obstacles to girls' participation in education. Community schools allow families to provide an education for girls within their own community – under their own control. Their flexible schedules allow girls to attend school while continuing to carry on their critical domestic role in the family. Community schools seek to minimize the financial burdens on families. The community consultation process that is used to develop community schools helps break down cultural barriers to girls' education.

WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, contact your ministry or department of education for a list of schools and organizations working in education in your region.

This paper is one of a series of project designs on activities to promote girls' education. The series includes:

1. Enhancing Girls' Education through Community Schools
2. Improving the Physical Environment in Support of Girls' Education
3. Investments That Yield High Returns: Scholarships for Girls
4. Using Incentives to Promote Girls' Education
5. Using Mentoring to Promote Girls' Education
6. Using Special Programs as a Strategy to Educate Out-of-School Girls
7. Using Girls' Clubs to Promote Girls' Education.

You can obtain copies of these reports from the Girls' and Women's Education Activity, American Institutes for Research, 1815 N. Ft. Myer Drive, Suite 600, Arlington, VA 22209, USA. Tel: (703) 527-5546; Fax: (703) 527-4661; e-mail: girls_education@air-dc.org

The Institute for International Research, a fully owned subsidiary of the American Institutes for Research, implements the Girls' and Women's Education Activity under contract to the U.S. Agency for International Development's Office for Women in Development in collaboration with Abt Associates, CARE, Management Systems International, Plan International, and World Learning under contract #HNE-5848-C-00-6046-00.